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ABSTRACT

While previous and contemporary counseling researchers have examined a variety of variables influencing counseling process and outcome, it remains to be seen how the counselor's personality relates to his or her counseling style. Because it seems that the role of personality traits and interpersonal skills would be more crucial for the prepracticum counselor trainee who lacks counseling experience, this study examined how the personality traits of prepracticum counselor trainees related to their preferences for a given style of counseling and to the adaptability of that style. Prepracticum counselor trainees (N=100) completed the Therapist Styles Inventory (TSI) and the Personal Styles Inventory (PSI). Four global personality traits assessed by the PSI, and four counselor styles and a counselor adaptability score assessed by the TSI were factor analyzed. The analysis indicated four factors: extroversion/introversion, stability/change, support/adaptability, and direction. The four counselor styles and counselor adaptability were differentiated from each other on the two PSI extroversion/introversion and stability/change dimensions. The counselor training implications of these results are such as to suggest that counselor trainers should be aware of the potential contribution of the trainee's normal personality traits to his or her adoption of a particular counseling style. (NB)

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Personality and its Relationship to Adaptability of Prepracticum Counseling Style

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Abstract

Examined the relationship between personality traits and counselor style and counselor adaptability. Prepracticum counselor trainees (n = 100) completed the Therapist Styles Inventory (TSI) (Howard, Nance, & Myers, 1986) and Personal Styles Inventory (PSI) (Kunce, Cope, & Newton, 1986). Four global personality traits assessed by the PSI, and four counselor styles and a counselor adaptability score assessed by the TSI were factor analyzed. The analysis indicated four factors: extroversion/introversion, stability/change, support/adaptability, and direction. The four counselor styles and counselor adaptability were differentiated from each other on the two PSI extroversion/introversion and stability/change dimensions.

Personality and its Relationship to Adaptability of Prepracticum Counseling Style

Previous and contemporary counseling researchers have examined a wide variety of variables influencing counseling process and outcome. In such research, the working alliance, social practices, interpersonal skills, theoretical orientation, and counselor and client attitudes, experience, personal variables, philosophy, values, and so forth have been investigated (Baker, 1982; Gelso, 1985; Kramer, Rappaport, & Seidman, 1979; Norcross, & Prochaska, 1983). The current interest in the relation between "counselor response modes" (Hill, Helms, Tichenor, Spiegel, O'Grady, & Perry, 1988) and counseling outcomes may beg the question about the possible prior influence of personality traits on intervention techniques. Accordingly, it was our intent in this study to confine the focus to the investigation of the relationship between the counselor's personality traits and intervention style and the adaptability of that style.

An examination of the literature on counselor traits makes clear that many more investigations have focused on client traits and counselor-client relationship variables affecting counseling process and outcome than on how counselor traits alone might relate to the counseling process. Using the findings of Norcross and Prochaska (1983) to draw further inferences, it would seem that for prepracticum counselor trainees with no counseling experience and only limited training, the most influential variables affecting the development of their theoretical orientation and counseling practices would be their own values, personal philosophy, life experiences, and theory which best enables them to better understand themselves and their clients.

It remains to be seen how the counselor's personality relates to his or her counseling style. It seems, moreover, that the role of personality traits and interpersonal skills would be more crucial for the prepracticum counselor trainee who lacks counseling experience. Hence, the focus of this study was to examine how the

personality traits of prepracticum counselor trainees related to their preferences for a given style of counseling and to the adaptability of that style. Consequently, we selected a new measure of normal personality styles, the Personal Styles Inventory (PSI) (Kunce, Cope, & Newton, 1986), and a recently developed measure of counselor intervention styles, the Therapist Styles Inventory (TSI) derived from the Adaptive Counseling and Therapy (ACT) model (Howard, Nance, & Myers, 1986).

The participants in this study were 100 upper-level undergraduate, master's and doctoral level students (22 males, 78 females) from a large midwestern university. They ranged in age from 20 to 49 ($\underline{M}$ = 27.9 years), and were either presently enrolled in or had taken one or more of the following graduate level courses: an introductory counseling theories course ($\underline{n}$ = 95), an introductory career development course ($\underline{n}$ = 38), a prepracticum counseling methods course ($\underline{n}$ = 35), and a group counseling course ($\underline{n}$ = 30). Ten students had one to two semesters of supervised practicum experience, and another 10 students had some relevant counseling work experience. The total years of experience of these 20 students ranged from one semester to 10 years ($\underline{M}$ = 2.7 years, 2 had 8 years, 1 had 10), primarily in alcohol rehabilitation, school counseling, or a community mental health center. Students were from the following ethnic backgrounds: 94% White, 3% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Black.

Each student completed the Therapist Styles Inventory (TSI) (Howard et al. 1986), the Personal Styles Inventory (PSI) (Kunce et al. 1986), a consent form and a demographic form. Students were informed of the general intent of the study and participation was voluntary. All inventories and forms were number coded to insure confidentiality of students' responses. Inventories were administered to students in small groups and averaged 90 minutes to complete.

Pearson Product-Moment correlations were used to determine the degree of association between the eight personality trait scores of the PSI and the four counselor styles and counselor adaptability score of the TSI. Because we were

interested in the relationships among these variables, we then used SPSSX to compute an exploratory principal components factor analysis of these data (results in Table 1). A scree plot showed that a four factor solution was indicated. Following an initial varimax rotation, we then ran an oblique rotation whose results were more clearly interpretable. Notably, the correlations between the factor loadings indicated that the four factors were independent of each other.

The first two factors were clearly identified as the two PSI basic trait dimensions of extroversion/introversion and stability/change. The PSI assesses 24 normal personality styles, formed into a circumplex model of eight personal styles in each of three domains: emotional, physical, and cognitive. Combinations of these personal styles form eight basic personality traits delineated along the two global dimensions of extroversion versus introversion, and need for stability versus need for change. The remaining two factors were identified as the two dimensions of counselor support/adaptability and direction as measured by the TSI. The TSI assesses four counseling styles, formed into four quadrants: Telling (high direction, low support), Teaching (high direction, high support), Supporting (low direction, high support), and Delegating (low direction, low support). Counselor adaptability is a measure of the degree to which the chosen counselor intervention response most effectively matches the client's needs.

The TSI factor scores were plotted on the two PSI factor dimensions of extroversion/introversion and stability/change (see Figure 1). First, counselor adaptability and the delegating counselor style were differentiated from the telling, teaching, and supporting counselor styles in the introversion direction on the PSI extroversion/introversion dimension. Second, counselor adaptability and the telling counselor style were differentiated from the teaching, supporting, and delegating counselor styles in the change direction on the PSI stability/change dimension. Hence, counselor adaptability was differentiated from all four of the counselor styles

on the two PSI dimensions in the introversion and change directions.

The PSI factor scores were plotted on the two TSI dimensions of stability/adaptability and direction. Although the TSI model was replicated by the TSI factor scores, the stability/adaptability and direction dimensions were not useful in differentiating between the PSI factor scores.

In conclusion, these results replicated the circumplex nature of PSI scores as reported in prior studies (Kunce et al. 1986; Kunce, & Anderson, 1988; Kunce, & Newton, 1989). Likewise, these results were in accord with the nature of the four counseling styles and counselor adaptability proposed in the ACT model (Howard et al. 1986). The placement of the factor scores of the TSI variables on the PSI dimensions provide some indication of a relationship between personality and counselor style, although the relationship is not a strong one. Perhaps using a larger sample size and factor analyzing the eight basic personality traits or the 24 personal styles, rather than the global extroversion/ introversion and stability/change dimensions of the PSI, would provide greater differentiation between counselor styles and counselor adaptability in terms of personality.

These matters warrant further research. Future research could examine personality influences on counselor style and counselor adaptability over time and at various levels of counselor development and training. Other research might examine possible gender differences in personality and how those relate to counselor style and counselor adaptability. Results from such research might reveal possible personality influences on counselor intervention style and the resulting efficacy of those interventions. For now, the counselor training implication of these results are such as to suggest that counselor trainers should be aware of the potential contribution of the trainee's normal personality traits to his or her adoption of a particular counseling style.

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Table 1

Variable Means, Standard Deviations, Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, and Correlations Among the Factors

	Factor Loadings					
Variables	1	2	3	4	M	SD
PSI						
Extroversion	.99	.02	.00	.13	15.9	2.2
Introversion	-.99	-.04	-.01	-.14	14.0	2.2
Stability	-.02	-.97	-.09	.02	15.7	2.4
Change	.03	.97	.08	-.02	14.2	2.4
TSI						
Telling	.15	.34	-.61	.32	2.4	1.6
Teaching	.17	-.09	.52	.82	11.1	3.4
Supporting	-.12	.00	.22	-.95	7.4	3.0
Delegating	-.25	-.12	-.74	-.18	3.1	1.9
Adaptability	-.14	.29	.64	-.01	69.8	4.7
Eigenvalues	2.29	2.12	1.67	1.46		
Percent of Variance	25.4	23.6	18.6	16.2		
Factor 1	1.00					
Factor 2	.03	1.00				
Factor 3	-.00	.04	1.00			
Factor 4	.17	.03	.01	1.00		

Note: n = 100. Factor 1 = Extroversion/Introversion, Factor 2 = Stability/Change, Factor 3 = Support/Adaptability, Factor 4 = Direction.

Figure 1. TSI Factor Scores Plotted on the PSI Dimensions of Extroversion/Introversion and Stability/Change.